Leadership Talk

My leadership journey began in an intentional way 6 years ago. I had worked in a large Catholic parish in the suburbs of Dallas for 20 years. A parishioner approached me and handed me this book and basically said "I see you as a leader and I want to support you in growing even more so that you can grow in your impact on the Kingdom."

I can honestly say that until that time, for 20 years, I never had a priest or supervisor approach with me from a fundamental posture of "I see you, I see your potential. I appreciate all that you do. Let me know how I can support you in growing in your leadership.

I was MANAGED. But I wasn't LED.

MANAGEMENT VS. LEADERSHIP
This leads to an interesting point of the difference between management and leadership:

Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things.

The activity of management usually includes: Planning, Budgeting, Organizing, Staffing, Controlling and Problem Solving

Whereas leadership = Establishing Direction, Aligning people, Motivating and Inspiring

Working IN the parish. Working ON the parish.

The case for change that Matt presented is so important. Because we aren't here to talk about being a better leader for the sake of just being more efficient, effective or even just healthy. Those are aspects of leadership. But ultimately when we speak about this key of the "best of leadership" it is SO THAT we can lead our communities to live out the Great Commission so as to bring people into a life saving encounter with Jesus Christ. That is end game of good leadership.

That is why this breakout is appropriately called dynamic leadership... because the goal is dynamic, transformative change... parishes as missionary outposts.

Dynamic does not mean charismatic!

DEMYSTIFYING LEADERSHIP
But the other reason, that it took 20 years for me to take seriously leadership is that I didn't see it as spiritual or aligned with ministry. This misunderstanding was so unfortunate for me and I know this is the case for so many others in the church.

It is often said that in the 7-10 years of priest formation that leadership formation is not substantial. I'm not sure if that is right. My sense is that there are many priests who are great
leaders but it is often because they have taken it upon themselves to grow in their leadership. Or if there are various leadership initiatives they might be more about how to be an administrator/manager.

What I came to learn is that everything I have learned about leadership (since I have embraced the "genre" of leadership) has helped me to better serve people, better love people, has taught me how to bring out the best in people... I have learned how to have hard conversations that typically aren't a part of Catholic parish culture. I've learned how to help lead other people by making them the heroes and i've learned how to lead myself. I can honestly say that everything I have learned about leadership has helped me to be a better Christian.

3 POINTS TO DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP

If the essence of dynamic leadership in the church is to carry out the Great Commission so that people are brought into a lifesaving encounter with Jesus Christ, then what are the most important elements of that type of leadership? In addition to working alongside many priests in large parishes (and working with young men who became priests), Matt and I have had the honor of coaching dozens of priests all over the world over the past few years. We want leave you with 2 points that we think are most important about dynamic leadership...

#1... Don't Go it Alone. Leadership is a Team Sport.

This is about leading out of teams. It's recognizing nobody has all the gifts. We all have blindspots.

I know of many priests have experienced or seen "shared leadership" done poorly and are skeptical by models of team leadership involved the laity that seem to relegate a priest to being one member of a committee. That couldn't be further from the truth in the way that we or I know other ministries coach priests to lead out of team.

We talk about leading out of a team though and not just leading a team, or leading through a team. Leading out of a team means that while the priest is still clearly the leader, this isn't just having a team to advise him. No this is having a group of people who share the pastors vision... (4 Non-Negotiables Slide?) they are people who the pastor trusts and can be vulnerable with... they are people who can engage in healthy conflict with the pastor around the big ideas and challenges facing the parish. They aren't just “yes” men and women. They are people who balance out the pastor, bringing different gifts... once again recognizing that nobody has all the gifts.

Fr. Henry stories...

I was one leadership team at St. Ann in Coppell with Fr. Henry Petter. Fr. Henry is a classic shepherd. He is highly relational and empathetic. Fr. Henry loves harmony. But Fr. Henry doesn't have a strategic bone in his body. He's not a visionary. He wasn’t great at executing details. But he didn't need to be. He had a team.
When I think about the benefits of a leadership team, it isn’t just about making great decisions and leading well. It is also for the health and sanity of the priests, so that they don’t have to carry the burden of leadership alone. I’ve seen and heard so many stories, even recently, of priests leaving the priesthood recently. I’m sure it’s complicated but I can’t help but wonder how often has to do with priests finally crumbling under an unsustainable model of leading.

Soon after Fr. Henry came to St. Ann, he had a visit to the hospital that was essentially identified as an anxiety attack. The craziness of a mega parish and burden of leadership was overwhelming. However, at 70 years of age, 40 years as a priest, and a year later after we attended the first Divine Renovation conference and he established a leadership team and got coaching, he said "I have never felt more supported, more confident and more at peace in my leadership. I've never slept this good." That was the impact of a leadership team on Fr. Henry and I hope you can experience the same.

The 2nd principle involves a priest not just ministering to people but ministering through people. That means that means shifting away from a model of parish wherever everything and anything runs through the pastor or priests.

I think a great example of this principle and the need for this type of leadership in another story in Scripture, the story of Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18. I’m sure you all know this story. Moses had a problem. He was exhausted. He was managing the affairs and issues of 2-million people. Every problem was brought before Moses for him to judge and render his decision.

Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, goes to visit him in the wilderness. While Jethro is impressed at what God has done to free the former slaves, he’s concerned about Moses. He observes Moses sitting from sun-up to sun-down judging over the people’s affairs. When he asks Moses why he does this all by himself, Moses replied:

"Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.” (v 15-16)

Jethro was shocked. He couldn’t believe that Moses was managing so much in so little time. Jethro said the following to Moses:

"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you and you cannot handle it alone."

From there Jethro basically advises Moses to lead through others. Have key officials who you work most closely with to carry out the work.

"select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials...have them serve as judges for the people at all times.” (v 21-22) In other words, Jethro advised Moses to delegate.
Jethro advised Moses to take on only the most difficult cases. This is what we help priest do, lead in such a way that they can focus on the things that only they can do - sacraments, preaching and dealing with the big leadership issues for moving the parish forward.

Which leads to the final point on leadership to leave you with: **Over-investing in the right people.**

Of course we see this with Jesus. There were the 12. And even the 72. But there were also the 3... Peter, James and John. That's often a model we see play out in the healthiest parishes. The 72 represent the ministry leaders or other key leaders. The 12 represents the staff, clergy, council leads. The 3 often represent the team that the priests invites mostly closely into his leadership that the priest over-invests in. Talking about over-investing in a handful of people often makes people uncomfortable... because this means that a leader isn't equally available to everyone else. But this IS the model that we see Jesus lead out of.

Not leadership for being more efficient, effective, healthy... although these are good things and a fruit of good leadership... we are talking about leadership SO THAT we can advance the mission of Jesus, bring people to life saving encounter with Jesus

Leadership – not about being dynamic, outgoing, Type A...
Humility as key
Priests bearing the most fruit are humble priests who want more for their parish, their priesthood and for the church
Ex... Fr. Bob Murray